The Ultimate Cure

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The Ultimate Cure

by hheroes

Summary

Red is the ultimate cure for sadness.

Entries for Raphril Week on Tumblr. Eight fics for eight days.

Chapter 1: Red

Chapter Summary

> Raph reaches for her hands and April can barely form a complete thought when he grabs them and presses her fingers to his lips. “You don’t have to hide from me,” he tells her softly, almost a reminder, “You know that.”

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

At first, April is flying.

She floats in the air with grace and ease, soaring over the top of the city as it lights her path. The feeling is easy to fall in love with; she’s so caught up in her happiness that she doesn’t notice when she starts to plummet, but suddenly she’s hurtling through the air while her arms flail uselessly by her sides.

She’s falling, panicked and with no way out, staring in horror at the ground rushing up at her, and she jumps awake just before she makes contact.

At least her bed is softer than the hard pavement in her dreams; after a few deep breaths, she’s relaxed.

Relaxed and, unfortunately, *awake*. Even though her heart is no longer pumping wildly, she’s too wide eyed to fall asleep again just yet. So she sits up and rubs her hands together, and only then does she realize she’s not in her own house.

It doesn’t particularly worry her, though. After a quick scan of her surroundings, April recognizes everything enough to conclude that she’s in Raph’s room. And this isn’t the first time she’s woken up in his bed--after all, during her extended stay in the lair she’d taken up residence in his room while he had roomed with Mikey. If anything, she finds it soothing, and she pushes her hair off her shoulders feeling comfortably safe as she leaves the bed to get herself a glass of water.

Apparently, it’s not as late as she thought it was. Donnie and Mikey are playing video games in the living room, and they both glance up at her as walks by.

“Hey,” she says sleepily, warming inwardly when their smiles light up.

There’s something...strange about the way Donnie looks at her. As if there’s something missing, but she’s too tired to give it much thought.

“Good to see you in the land of the living,” Donnie teases.

“Yeah, April. We thought you were out for the whole night,” Mikey says. “After that last movie you were out like a light.”

She doesn’t have any idea what Mikey is talking about, but that isn’t exactly abnormal, so she just shrugs. “Had a pretty weird dream that woke me up and now I’m really thirsty. Trust me though, after that I’ll get back to sleeping like the dead.”

She slips off to the kitchen after that, grabs a bottle of water from the fridge and downs half of it in one go. Then, because she truly can’t resist, she pops open the freezer to pay a surprise visit to Ice Cream Kitty.

The freezer is empty.

That’s not the weirdest thing she expected to see in their freezer, it was the Hamato brothers she was talking about, after all, but she’s still a little disappointed that Ice Cream Kitty was moved without her knowing. April takes her water and pads back to the living room, pouting sourly

Donnie and Mikey don’t pause when she returns. She slips into the seat between them. “So how long has Ice Cream Kitty been gone?”

“Who?” Donnie says, then grunts, “Dang it, Mikey, watch the friendly fire!”

“Sorry, D.”

“Ice Cream Kitty,” April repeats. “You know, my cat that Mikey mutated? She’s been in the freezer for like a month.” Donnie is prone to spells of forgetfulness, most often when he’s working away in his lab, but the quirk arises whenever he’s particularly focused on something. And judging from the number of kills he has in the video game, he’s really, *really* focused.

Mikey laughs, to her irritation. “You sleeptalking or something? YO APRIL, WAKEY WAKEY.”

“I’m awake!” she snaps at him, and he dissolves into snickers, still engrossed in his game. April huffs and drinks moodily from her water bottle.

“Mike, you upset her,” Donnie faux-whispers.

April scoffs. “I’m not upset,” she says, and winces at how unconvincing it sounds.

“She’s clearly upset,” Donnie says sagely.

“Oops. I’ll make it up to her after this level.”

“I’m not upset,” April says again, louder this time.

“Mhmm,” the brothers hum. April glares at them both individually. Mikey winks at her, and Donnie smiles wide enough to show all his teeth.

All his teeth, perfectly in a line, not a single space to be found.

April can't help herself--she stares like an idiot at his mouth until Donnie's brow furrows. "You okay?

"Your teeth."

He frowns. "My...teeth?"

"Since when have you had perfect teeth?" Come to think of it, her memory's a bit fuzzy, but she definitely remembers Donnie's gap from before she fell asleep. The sheer size of it made it hard to forget. "You used to have a tooth gap. It was, like, *huge*."

Donnie snorts, rolling his eyes. "Very funny, April. I know the gap I had when I was younger was pretty bad, but that doesn't mean you have to--"

"When you were younger?" she interrupts. "How old are you now?"

"Fifteen." He pauses the game and looks at her as if she's grown a second head. "Are you sure you're okay?"

April clams her mouth shut and nods once--an uneven, jerky movement. Mikey still has his freckles, and Donnie's eyes are still brown, but he's missing his gap and acting like it's the most normal thing in the world, and for some reason, the situation gives April a bad feeling in the pit of her stomach.

"I...need to use the bathroom," she mumbles in a rush, and runs off before she can be stopped.

The bathroom is where it always is and April locks the door behind her before flinging herself at the sink. She splashes water on her face and tries to remember everything about the day before--and as her mind draws a blank, she stands up straight to look at her reflection and screams at the top of her lungs.

The girl in the mirror as short, blonde hair and green eyes. The only familiar feature on her is the wide expanse of freckles--aside from that, April is looking at a complete stranger. A stranger whose hands move when hers do, who has her voice and has her thoughts and--

April doubles over and grips the counter. She runs more water over her face and rubs at her eyes. When she looks up again, the blonde in the mirror looks just as frightened as she feels.

Someone knocks hard on the door, and she finds herself saying "come in" before she can really register the words. Within moments, strong arms and holding her up and pressing her close.

"What happened? How come you didn't come back to bed?"

April relaxes at the voice; Raph's unmistakable gruffness is recognizable, at least. (She wonders how he managed to get to her before Donnie though, and why he's hugging her willingly, instead of as a last resort. His second question means less than nothing to her; it's

not a question Raph would normally ask her, and therefore not a question that deserves acknowledgement.)

“I just…” she shakes her hands, and his grip tightens around her. “...it’s nothing.”

Raph reaches for her hands and April can barely form a complete thought when he grabs them and presses her fingers to his lips. “You don’t have to hide from me,” he tells her softly, almost a reminder, “You know that.”

April nearly jumps away from him, but her mind is stuck on the fact that he is *kissing her hands* and none of that makes sense -- Raph *doesn’t* kiss people’s hands, Raph wouldn’t kiss *her* hands--

She looks up and bites down on her lip to choke back another scream.

Raph’s mask is jet black. His eyes are still green and his shell is still cracked but his mask is black like night, black like *Slash*, and April shuts her eyes to make the image go away.

When she opens them, she only sees black.

“April?” Raph asks quietly. He lets go of her hand to cup her face; holds her still while he searches her eyes. “You’re shaking. Seriously, what’s wrong?"

It’s been a very long time since April has been afraid of Raph. In the early days, when things like alien invasions were still new to her, she’d been terrified of him--he was so unfamiliar and so *rough*. Only after months of getting to know him had she realized that Raph was about as scary as a teddy bear with drawn-on fangs (not that she would ever tell him that; as far as he knew, he was still intimidating.)

But now, staring at the black mask and unable to look away, April feels thoroughly *spooked*.

Raph is barely contained fire dressed in red, not soft kisses and soothing whispers hiding behind black. She doesn’t recognize who this is--despite the green eyes and chipped shell, she can’t image that this is the same Raph she’d gotten to know.

“You’re not…” she starts.

“Yeah?” His gaze never leaves her eyes. “I’m not what?”

April fumbles for the words helplessly. She’s clutching onto Raph because it’s either that or fall--but he seems to think it’s a positive sign and holds on to her just as tightly in response.

She shudders, trying to wiggle away or at least loosen his grip. “You’re not *red*,” she chokes out. “And neither am I --and my eyes are *green* -- I don’t know what’s happening but I -- I’m sorry, but you need to let go of me.”

Raph obliges instantly, and she stumbles until she finds support from the counter. He hasn’t stopped giving that imploring look that she’s used to from Leo, but on his face it just makes the air turn stale. “What the heck are you talking about?”

“Your mask!” she blurts out. “It’s -- it’s *black*. How long has it been black?”

Something dark ghosts over the expression on his face; it looks like sadness, the kind that comes from losing something--or some*one*..He sucks in air and nods once. “Oh, alright, it’s like *that*. No problem, just take it easy.” He reaches for her again, but after she flinches away he stops his advances and the sad look deepens. “Do you remember your name?”

“Of course,” she snaps. “I’m April O’Neil.”

“Good. And my name?”

April can’t understand where he’s going with this, but reciting things that she knows takes some of the tension out of her shoulders. “Raphael Hamato. But you’re really -- you’re just Raph.”

He gives her a bittersweet smile. It hurts to look at, so she turns her head to the side. “How old are you?”

“Sixteen.”

“What am I to you?

She blinks once. “I -- what?”

“What am I to you?” Raph repeats steadily. His voice doesn’t waver. April gets the impression that he’s done this before, but that thought does nothing to ease her nerves.

“You’re my friend,” she says at last. “You saved me and my dad from the Kraang and...why are you looking at me like that?”

Raph takes a step to close the distance between them, slow enough that it doesn’t make her jump, but she can’t figure out what he’s trying to do. “Raph, what’s going on? Why am I blonde and why isn’t your mask red and -- *why* are you staring at me like that?”

“Am I real to you?”

“What?”

Raph juts his lip out in true Raph-fashion, like he always does when he’s feeling particularly annoyed. “Am I real to you, April?”

She wants to say yes. She wants, more than anything, to accept that Raph is real--and somewhere he is, and he and his brothers are waiting for her--but right here and right now, the Raph she’s staring at is *can't* be real. April remembers red and grunts and grumbled insults, not gentle inquiries and butterfly kisses.

When she shakes her head, no words come out. There’s nothing for her to say.

He looks as if the world has come crashing down around him. For a moment, she’s lost in that look--she can’t remember the last time she’d seen him so *crushed*--until Raph drags his

hands over his head, undeniably wrought with concern. “Oh, *April*,” he says in a voice that she can only describe as *sappy*.

Then he cradles her face and kisses her as if he’s done it a thousand times before.

April freezes. She doesn’t move toward or away from him--just stands perfectly still, staring down her nose at the turtle in the black mask that’s kissing her on the mouth.

Not that she’d ever imagined kissing Raph--it’s just that, the *gentleness* is a surprise. April figured Raph was the type to kiss the same way he fought: recklessly, forcefully, action now, talking later. But he’s sweet about it, and if anything, that only makes April feel even worse about the situation at hand.

Eventually, Raph pulls away, searching her face like he expects to find a change. “I’m real, okay? Always have been, always will be.”

April plants both hands firmly on his plastron and shoves him away. Sweet or no, April doesn’t want to be kissed right now; she wants answers and explanations. “What,” she demands, “the *hell* was that?”

Raph blanches. “What do you mean?”

“Since when do you -- have you --” she feels herself getting flustered, red rising to her cheeks, “You can’t just -- you can’t just *kiss* me like that!”

He looks as if she slapped him. “That usually works,” he says dumbly. “That *always* works.”

“Would you just give me a direct answer?”

“I don’t know how to!” He throws up his hands in frustration. “You’re asking me impossible questions--you’ve always been blonde with green eyes and my mask has always been black. Since *forever*, okay?” Raph winces as the words come out, and quickly backpedals. “I’m -- I’m sorry, I’m just… April, you’re just freaking me out. You’re usually...*better* by now.”

April grabs a handful of her hair. “I am not *sick*, Raphael, and I have too many memories of being called ‘Carrot-Top’ for me to believe that for a second. My hair is *red*, your mask is *red*, and my eyes are *blue*. And you *never* kiss me!”

Of all the things, Raph looks most offended by the latter accusation. “I kiss you all the time! We’ve been dating for a while now, April, why wouldn’t we kiss?”

“Dating?” April says. Because, seriously. “Me and you -- we're not --we can be -- *dating*?”

“I’m real, April, this is all real. You have to remember--”

“I can’t remember things that have *never happened before*,” she says harshly. Her hands find the counter again, gripping the corners so hard her knuckles turn white. If this is a dream, she needs to wake up *now*.

“Your name is April O’Neil, you’re sixteen, and three years ago we saved you and your dad from some aliens,” Raph says, like it should mean something to her. He sounds more desperate than she is to make sense of all this. His eyes are huge, like he’s scared, like he’s vulnerable.

April stares at him. “That’s not right. I didn’t meet you guys until last September.”

Raph keeps going. “You kissed me on your fire escape in December. It was snowing, and you we’re playing the *worst* song on that dumb little radio…” he trails off, swept up in a past that she’s positive never existed. “We made things official a week before Christmas--”

“That’s *wrong!”* she tells him firmly, shaking her head, “That never happened!”

“--and you have nightmares about the aliens that kidnapped you because they did -- they did *something* to you, you’ve never really been specific, and sometimes, when you wake up, you don’t remember what’s real and what’s not.” Raph takes a shuddering breath. “But April, I’m here, I’m *real*, okay? And I’m always here for you. I *love* you.”

Silence falls between them, save for the constant in and out of their breaths. And things that aren’t real don’t *breathe*, yet Raph is inhaling and exhaling just like she is--

The words are...familiar. April doesn’t know why, but she knows he’s said them before, she knows that his mask is black--no, *red*--andher eyes are...her eyes are…

“You...I…”

She shakes her head, trying to clear out her thoughts. Her name is April O’Neil. She is sixteen years old. She has blonde (*red*) hair and green (*blue?*) eyes and too many freckles to count, but Raph loves them anyway; he loves everything about her.

Her name is April O’Neil and-- “No,” she tells herself, “my hair is *red*, and his mask is--”

She was sixteen when she kissed and he was fifteen when he kissed back. They were on fire escape on a snowy Saturday night, and while they kissed her radio played *Alphabeat* softly behind them. (Raph had called her cheesy, and April had kissed him to shut him up, and things escalated from there.)

“Black,” Raph supplies tenderly, “my mask is *black*.”

Yesterday, she was at the lair to watch movies, but she fell asleep halfway through *The Wizard of Oz* and Raph carried her to bed, kissed her forehead, and slid under the covers beside her. (“Sensei’ll get mad at us,” she had whispered drowsily into his neck. Raph shrugged and promised to claim full responsibility, and she fell asleep with his arms still around her.)

April clutches her head. *None* of this is real, yet *all* of this is real. All of this -- it *has* to be --

His name is Raphael Hamato. His mask is black as night, black like eternity--the same thing she sees when she looks in his eyes.

She is his and he is hers and it's so real it *hurts*.

"...I...I remember," she says, already taking the steps toward him, meeting him halfway. She kisses him--or maybe he kisses her, everything is moving too fast--and after that, nothing else matters.

April wakes up to the sound of metal clashing against metal and light so bright that it hurts her eyes. She can't breathe -- the air around her is suffocating her, and she feels herself sinking until a pair of green eyes open above her and pull her back up.

"--ril!" Raph slaps at her cheek, not quite violent but not exactly gentle either. "April, can you hear me?"

She blinks drowsily at him. Her vision is swimming; she can barely see him. "Raph?"

"Yeah, that's the name, don't wear it out," he says. "Can you stand?"

April tries to wiggle her toes. "Are my legs still there?" she asks him, truly curious.

Raph snorts. "Alright, I'm gonna take that as a no." He reaches for her and April flinches before she can stop herself. "I'm...I'm not gonna hurt you," he says, frowning. He looks confused that he even has to explain that to her.

"I...I know," April says shakily. The last time she saw Raph she was kissing him, and now she she's laying flat against a cold, white table in a cold, white room, with red rings around her wrists and ankles and necks from the thick, metal binds that Raph had ripped away.

This has Kraang written all over it, and she has a few fuzzy memories of being captured and put under--none of which are as clear as the ones she has of kissing him. She doesn't think she'll ever forget that.

"I know," she says again, more to herself than to him, "I just…"

She stares at him, open-mouthed, because her eyes have cleared and he's *red*. His eyes are green and his shell is chipped and his mask is red like the fire he's always had in him. But she can't -- she has to be sure--

"What color is my hair?"

Raph just blinks at her. "It's red? *Really* red. You still look like a Weasley, if that's what you're asking. Not sure the Kraang can do much to help you with that."

April wants to sob. Instead, she bursts out, "Oh, thank *God*."

"How about thanking me first?" And he smirks at her, reaching out again. "Now we gonna bust this alien dump or not? 'Strapped to a dissection table' is *not* a good look on you."

Red, he had said. *Just like it should be.*

April smiles and takes his hand without hesitation.

Chapter End Notes

in the original concepts for the show, april was a blonde and carried around a little red radio with her all the time, and raphael had a crush on her instead of donnie. these concepts were the basis of my little what-could-have-been world that april dreamed up.

Chapter 2: AU

Chapter Summary

> “I’m not like you, but that’s okay. I like you anyway.”

Chapter Notes

> a soulmate au in which every one has the name of their soulmate written on the back of their left hand. or, well, almost everyone. also, i was going to keep these on order of the prompts but unfortunately, i didn't write them in order and have just decided to post them as i go.

The fact that April was born without a name written on the back of her hand has never really bothered her. Her dad used to tell her than a lot of kids didn’t have names, but some were ashamed of it and covered up their hands with gloves like the kids who did have names so they wouldn’t feel left out.

As a preschooler, April had been filled with righteous anger at the very thought of pretending to be something she was not; not even her dad could stop her from marching up to kids and presenting the clean slate of her hand and telling them, “I’m not like you, but that’s okay. I like you anyway.”

Later, as she grew older, kids became more and more aggressive in their reactions toward her. Some prodded and poked at her, demanding if she used make-up to hide the name; others shunned her, tried to belittle her for having no soulmate; and others still terrorized her, driving her face into the ground with their boots and accusing her of being inhuman. “Everybody’s got a soulmate! Only animals and aliens don’t! So which are you, April, huh?”

And even then, April picked herself up, wiped away the dust from her shirt, and never once walked with her head down or hand hidden.

It wasn’t that she knew was a freak, by their standard, every person she had ever met made it all to clear to her for it to go unnoticed, but she found that having no name on her hand didn’t take anything away from her. In fact, it gave her something: a uniqueness from the rest of the world, enough for her to separate herself from the majority of the populate. Enough to think of herself as special.

She can’t help her curiosity when she finds out the turtles don’t have names either. Leo unwraps the tape on his fingers and allows her to examine his hand.

Aside from the color, it's the same as hers. Smooth as ever, unmarred by any name's presence or removal. She knew what a scarred hand looked like, the hand of someone whose soulmate had died, after spending years of her life tracing the scar on her father's hand.

"Wow," she says, feeling a bit lightheaded. She holds onto Leo's hand tightly. "I've never — I thought I was the only one."

Leo's eyes flash, and after a moment's hesitation he nods his understanding. "It's scary. And it's also…kind of sad." He spares a quick glance at the unmarked skin on his hand and winces slightly. "It's like a reminder that we're not human — we'll never be human. We don't have any human's name, and no human has ours." He winces again. "It's like we're not even supposed to *exist.*"

April thinks of her middle school days and being asked to choose between an alien and an animal. She thinks of the way the dirt tasted in her mouth when her face was shoved into it. She thinks of all the friends she'd never made staring at her hand in shock, afraid to touch her.

It all reminds her of her solitary life. And though she still found pride in her specialness, knowing someone else shares her pain makes everything… *better.*

"I know the feeling," she says and her voice is heavy with emotion. "Trust me, I know. After years of people telling you that you're either an alien or an animal you start…you start to believe them. You start to believe you don't really belong with humans. And honestly? I don't think I do. "

Leo starts to object, but April smiles sadly and shakes her head. "It's okay, Leo. Five of the greatest people I know aren't human, and I would rather belong with them any day." She pats his hand and eventually, he smiles back.

###

Raph's injury is, for once, minor; just a graze from a blade on the back of his wrist. April hardly thinks about making him uncomfortable as she eases the tape off his hands, ignoring his absurd panic as she assess the wound until she sees a flicker of black on his hand and inhales sharply.

There is definitely writing on the back of Raph's hand.

"Don't look," he hisses, slapping his other hand over the lettering. "Quit staring!"

"Leo said you don't have soulmates."

"Leo lied," Raph growls. "Now could you hurry up? I don't like leaving this uncovered."

Aprils stares at him. Breathing is hard, like a hand is closing around her throat. But she had touched Leo's hand—she'd *seen* the unmarked skin. If he lied to her, that meant…that meant…

Nodding stiffly, she extends her hands out again. “Sorry,” she chokes out. Crying is not an option. In fact, being sad about in general is not an option; she’s managed to live this long being an anomaly, there’s no reason for her to start feeling sorry for herself now. The boys have never promised to be unmarked like her, nor have they ever hated her for it. But still, she feels so…

Alone.

She finishes dressing Raph’s wound without asking any questions. After she’s finished, she stands up and walks away, her shoulders hunched and her hand hidden.

Raph calls out to her. She pretends not to hear him.

###

April doesn’t bring up the soulmate thing again; sometimes, she catches herself staring at Raph and quickly looks away, rubbing her hands. She has never perceived herself as less than any other person, but there’s a first for everything.

At some point Leo starts flashing her worried looks. His eyes seem honestly concerned, and she would give in to him if she didn’t feel so *betrayed*.

She misses how she used to feel. Having no soulmate has never bothered her, but now, she can hardly imagine having her preschool self’s confidence, let alone rekindle it.

Surprisingly enough, Leo isn’t the one to confront her; it’s Raph himself. Her stomach lurches and she forces herself not to look at his hand, but it’s so hard when she knows he has a soulmate, he’s been acknowledged by the universe, he’s *supposed* to exist, unlike her.

He’s more human than she is, and he’s got three fingers on each hand and a shell on his back.

More than anything, she wants to avoid this conversation. She wants to turn away and march off, she wants to go back to the playground and feel as confident as she had as a kid.

She wants, more than anything, to not be controlled by the lack of lettering on her hand.

“Raph,” she winces at how weak her voice sounds, “I don’t want to talk about it.”

As if he can’t hear her, Raph lifts his hand and aggressively rips the tape off. Beneath it is green skin, interrupted only by thick black letters placed there by an unseen hand.

“It came up two weeks ago,” he says shortly. “Leo didn’t lie on purpose. We weren’t born with names, alright? And none of the others have them either. It’s just *me*..”

April blinks. He lowers his hand before she can read the name and starts to wrap the tape around it again.

“So quit sulking just because you think you’re some kind of freak. There’re freaks all around you that you keep turning a blind eye to. They’ve got want you want, you’ve got what they want — you can either cry yourself to sleep over it or move the hell on with your life.” He

scowls deeply, his entire face darkening, “Not having a mark didn’t bother you until a week ago. Do yourself a favor and remember what it was like to not care about things you can’t control.”

It takes a moment for it to dawn on her, but April realizes he’s just as ashamed of his markings as she is of her bare skin.

It makes sense when she thinks about it: Raph grew up not having a name, accepting this fact, and then one day he wakes up different from everything he’s ever known, different from his *brothers*. He knows he’s not human, yet this burns on his skin like a taunt. It’s not so backwards after all.

April doesn’t speak as she reaches out for his hand.

He doesn’t move when she stops him in mid-motion. Slowly, she unravels what he’s already wrapped, watching his eyes, giving him the chance to back away.

Raph stares her down the whole time. “Before you look at the name, you gotta promise me one thing.”

She nods, eyes still on him.

“Whatever you see, whatever name it is, it changes nothing between us. Got it?”

“I promise,” she manages. She waits until Raph nods, then she inhales once and looks at his uncovered hand.

The letters stand out against his skin, instantly calling for her attention. She glides her fingers over them, memorizes the smooth feeling beneath her hand, and reads the name.

Once is all it takes. The air in the room freezes, seeps into her skin, chills her blood, but she can’t stop staring. And Raph is watching her through heavy lids, his stare so intense she can feel it.

APRIL.

His hand says — he is — that’s her name. That’s *her* name on his hand, that’s *her*, it has to be her, it’s written like it will be there forever. April chokes on her own words, stifling the sound by bringing a hand over her mouth while she stares at him.

Raph’s hunching in on himself, as if he’s trying to get as far away from her as possible. But he can’t be hiding from her, not now, not after —

“Nothing changes!” he says, his voice betraying the panic his face hides. “You promised me, April, nothing changes — you can’t — you can’t *leave.*”

She opens her mouth to speak, but no words come out. Raph looks at her, searching her face, and when she still doesn’t say anything he tries to rip his hand out of her grip. But she’s holding on to him fiercely, and even if her voice won’t work, her actions express her tacit vow to never let go, to never leave him.

he just can't tell if he believes her or not.

"Why would I *leave?*" she finally sputters. "That doesn't even make sense! What makes you think I'd want to leave?"

"Because now you know!" Raph croaks, his voice catching. "You were miserable when you figured out I had a name and you didn't — I don't want you to leave because it's your name and you don't have mine."

"I wouldn't — " she struggles, "I would *never* — "

"You don't know, April, you *might!* I don't want you to think you've gotta do me any favors either." He looks angry now, though very vulnerable. "I don't wanna be your pity date, or some charity gimmick or, or—"

"*Raphael!*" she shouts, and he falls silent.

April tries to take a few deep breaths and sort out her words before she says them. "Raph," she says, gentler this time around. He avoids her eyes, but she knows she has 100% of his attention. "I made a promise to you. The name's not going to change anything between us. If anything does happen, it'll happen over time, and it'll happen on it's own."

"But you don't *know* that," he tries again.

"I promised, didn't I? That's how I know."

She can't imagine his fear; she's never had this problem. But she's always felt that the name isn't a boundary, it's an opportunity. An introduction to possibilities, a promise for a strong bond, but it dictates nothing. It's still their life to control.

April sighs, "The name doesn't control us. We still get to decide what happens to us, no matter what. Nothing changes that."

(And it's *her* name, right there on Raph's wrist. Maybe she's supposed to exist after all.)

"…this doesn't change you either, April," Raph surmises quietly. "You don't need a name on someone's hand to validate you, like you thought. You did that yourself."

She looks at him in surprise.

"Um," he says, his cheeks beginning to color. "*Shut up.* You know what I mean."

She looks at his hand again: **APRIL.** She drinks in the sight, then picks up the tape and starts to wrap it up.

When she's finished, she gives him the widest smile she can manage. "I promised you that it's not going to change anything, and I'm keeping that promise," she tells him firmly. "But you have to know, even if I don't have your name, it doesn't mean anything. I won't care about you less or think of you differently. You don't need a name on someone's hand to validate you— you did that yourself."

His expression is still pained, but he manages to smirk, regardless of his discomfort with the situation. “Yeah? And where’d you hear that?”

April shrugs. “Someone I love told me.”

Raph’s startled look makes her smile again, even as she rubs at the untouched skin on her hand. Whether or not his name is on her hand, she does love him — he’s her friend. She belongs with him, and his family. They are, after all, the five greatest people she knows.

Maybe she has it wrong. Maybe, he’s just as human as she is.

Chapter 3: Midnight

Chapter Summary

> “He falls to his knees and he screams for what feels like eternity, and nobody is there to comfort him, and his shouts are carried away into the wind.”

Chapter Notes

> I decided to write a Raphril death scene. oops.

Raph knows the exact moment April dies.

He knows because one second she’s squeezing onto his hand and the next she’s limp in his grip; her eyes remain wide open but there’s nothing behind them, and her lips are parted as if she’s whispering to him, even in death. Her body looks like a painting, perfectly still and the pale of her skin is interrupted by dark, rich blood—blood that’s her own, or maybe his, he can’t quite tell.

Raph stares at the dead girl in his lap and he loses track of time. Everything is suddenly so, so *useless*. The world around him can burn for all he cares; the one person he’d been so desperate to save has slipped through his fingers, and with her took his heart.

April’s parted lips still carry the lingering sound of her voice. He isn’t even sure if there are actual words being said or if he’s just losing his mind, but he knows he can’t stay here any longer.

So he squeezes her hand once, for the last time, and gently moves it to lay over her chest. She’s so still.

She’s so *dead*.

Part of him wants to stay back, if only to yell at her. He wants to demand her return, or maybe belittle her departure, whichever, he isn’t sure. But he wants to scream until his throat feels raw, because that would, at least, distract him from the numbness that has seeped into his whole body.

So he does. He falls to his knees and he screams for what feels like eternity, and nobody is there to comfort him, and his shouts are carried away into the wind.

And after that, he wakes up.

###

The "April dying" dream has happened more times than he can count. Raph always knows exactly when she dies, but never, not once, has he found what kills her. There's always blood pouring from a wound he can't find, and she shivers from a cold he can't feel.

Each time, April holds onto his hand until her final breath, and he can never bring himself to let go just yet. He always lingers. He always hopes she'll wake up.

Honestly, it's getting *really* fucked up.

After the second or third time, he probably should've have gone to Sensei about it, but he didn't, because doing the opposite of what he knows he should do is kind of his thing. Besides, Sensei would offer cryptic advice that carries no meaning to a surly, exhausted Raph that just wants sleep without waking up in a cold sweat—it's better for his temper, and Sensei's opinion of him, that he keeps quiet. (This is what he tells himself, in the middle of the night when he jolts awake from yet another repetition of the same nightmare and wants nothing more than to run into his father's arms like a child.)

Or, worst case scenario, Sensei tells him his dreams are visions or warnings from the universe and Raph loses his mind, thanks to a single sentence.

Either path is one he'd rather avoid.

The only thing different about waking up this time around is that he feels hands on his shoulders and hears a voice saying his name. He pops open one eye and sees April, then he shuts it tightly, because of all the people in this world, she is the hardest to look at once he's returned to reality.

It's very unsettling that he knows what she looks like covered in blood and dying. And whenever he sees her alive and well, his brain jumbles the two images until panic clogs his throat and the entire experience just*blows*.

"Raph," April says urgently above him. "I know you can hear me. Wake up."

He grunts and rolls away from her, unaware of his surroundings and too tired to care. "No," he tells her in a voice that leaves no room for argument.

"Raph, c'mon."

"Get lost."

"I just want to know if you're okay."

"I'm a fucking bundle of joy. Mission accomplished. Now leave me alone."

"Oh yeah?" He hears the indignant trill in April's voice, feels her weight shift behind him. "Then how come you were whimpering my name in your sleep?"

Raph flinches. The silence draws out until it becomes unbearable, and he slowly opens his eyes and turns to look at her.

Her eyes are so blue and full of life. Her skin isn't deathly pale. Best of all, there's no blood showering her—just a rather annoyed look and a thin-lipped frown.

He tongue feels thick and heavy, too large for his mouth. He talks around it and feels stupid and oafish and very, very tired. "I…I was?"

"Yeah, you were," April says bluntly. "Sit up and talk to me. I'm worried about you."

She reaches out to him and Raph dodges her hand, sitting up so fast his head spins, but he does not want to feel her touch right now, and that's the more pressing matter at hand. He knows what she feels like, both alive and dead, and he's brain is so sluggish right now he's not sure he'll be able to tell the difference if she touches him.

"Don't be," he chokes out, eyeing her hand wearily. After a moment she takes the hint and with withdraws it. "I'm just peachy."

Raph winces at the sound of his own voice: hoarse, weighted with more emotion than he cares to show.

"Well I'm convinced," April says dryly. She hesitates before slowly invading the wide personal bubble he's created for himself. Raph forces down a small flash of panic and she stops cold.

"Why are you in my room anyway?" He decides to ignore how pathetic his voice sounds. Maybe that'll make it easier.

"You're in my apartment, genius. You and Mikey came over for dinner, ate me out of house and home, and then he skipped back to the lair like the ray of sunshine he is and you passed out on the couch." She sniffs bitterly, "And on top of the remote."

Raph doesn't remember any of that. He looks around, slowly drinking in everything around him. There are pictures of April and Kirby everywhere, and carpeting on the floor and paint on the walls and the whole place feels more like a lived-in domicile and less like a barely inhabited sewer.

He manages a grunt that doesn't express much, but it makes April smile, if a little exasperated.

"Not even an apology," she muses. "Anyway, I was trying to write an essay for school tomorrow and you started shaking and twitching a lot, and then you whimpered and said my name. You sounded pained and," her face turns serious, "you did *not* look 'peachy.'"

Raph wants to tell her, "*Well I just watched you die, so excuse me for being a little out of it*," but he bites his tongue and offers a limp shrug instead. "I had a… bad dream, that's all. You don't have to put on a nightlight or anything—I'm a big boy, April, I can handle myself."

She purses her lips. "What were you dreaming about?"

“Huh?”

“What were you dreaming about?”

Raph drives his fists into the pillow cushions and tries not to think about blood, or lifeless blue eyes, or anything that might involve death-y scenarios. “Nothing,” he lies, voice breaking.

April looks ready to jump him. “Would you quit making this so difficult? I’m not asking to embarrass you, Raph. It’s the middle of the night, you nearly had a seizure on my couch, and I just want to know what the heck is going on with you.”

As she speaks, her eyes start to shine. Raph feels his stomach turn to stone. She had been scared for him, worried about *him*, all for him—

“I was dreaming,” he says thickly, “about you.”

April cocks her head to the side. “…Me?”

“No, this other April O’Neil I know. *Yes* you, Einstein.” This is a mistake; he can feel it in the way his voice shakes, the tension in his hands, he should not be talking about this, he should not be…

Her hands are on his shoulders. Raph doesn’t remember when that happened. He stiffens in her touch, once again fighting off panic, and either April doesn’t notice or holds on despite it.

“What happens in the dream?”

“Let go of me,” Raph says in the calmest voice he can muster.

“Raph, don’t avoid the question. What happens in your dream?”

“You *really* need to let go of me.”

“Raph—”

“LET GO OF ME,” he thunders, and then throws her arms off himself.

His breath rattles in his chest and his hands start to shake and this is the moment he’d been trying to avoid, this mess is something he never wants April to see, yet here he is coming undone on her couch while she watches in gross fascination.

April seems to finally understand that touching him is a bad idea. He counts to ten, then twenty, backwards and forwards, and digs his hands deep into the cushions. Breathing becomes a struggle that he slowly works to overcome, and he can’t help but think this is all so stupid, he’s doing this over some *dream*.

Some dream he’s had dozens of times, some dream that he fears, in the back of his mind, to be the future, but a dream nonetheless. He’s stronger than dreams and nightmares and fear itself.

He is Raphael Hamato, nothing in this world can bring him to his knees…

…except for April O'Neil.

Oh man, he's *so* boned.

Bitter laughter is what brings him down this time around. Half of him knows that he's scaring the wits out of April right now, but the other half is too caught up in the realization that April is the common factor in all of this. April is what brings him to his knees in his dream—she has him screaming at the sky, she has him puffing to calm his breath, she has him panicking ridiculously even when she's awake.

April O'Neil makes a terrible weakness to have, he thinks, and he laughs about it.

"Alright, well, you've thoroughly scared the hell out of me tonight, and after all this I'm gonna need to change my pants," she says in a tiny voice.

Raph stifles his laughter and looks at her. She offers him the smallest of smiles, barely there, but at least he knows she's trying.

"I've been having the same dream for a couple months," he explains. "And it always starts the second you die. Like, you die in my arms. I can't save you because I don't even know what hits you, and you die every single time, and if I have to see you covered in blood one more time I'm gonna lose it."

April blinks at him. "Huh," she says finally. "Now I can understand why you didn't want to talk about it."

"Yeah. Kind of makes for shitty small talk."

She nods at him, still obviously curious but trying to give him space. "…what else happens?"

Raph gives her a wild look, "You just said you understood!"

"I want to understand a little more! What else happens?"

"You die," Raph says, with some reluctance. "And then I lose my mind and start screaming at the things until I wake up." He winces at her sickened expression and quickly adds, "The first couple times I just kind of sat there, but I think I started screaming to force myself awake. It…helps."

"Oh my god," April says, "that's so messed up. That's just — that's so —*Jesus Christ*, Raph, how do you even wake up in the mornings?"

He doesn't say anything for a long time. "Waking up is easier when you don't fall asleep in the first place."

"Jesus Christ," April says again, covering her face with her hands. "No wonder you look so tired all the time. I thought you just needed a nap but you need a prayer circle and a long hug too."

“Don’t hug me,” he says quickly. “Touching makes it worse. A lot worse.”

“How come?” April asks warily, like she doesn’t actually want to know.

“I’m always holding onto you when you die in the dream. Waking up is like…what’s the dream and what’s not, you know?”

April stares at him, long and hard, with her mouth slightly open. “Why haven’t you said anything?” Then louder, “Why the hell haven’t you said anything *this whole time*?”

Raph blanches. His recent discovery of bending to only one person in the known universe hangs on the tip of his tongue, but he swallows it down. He only stares at his hands, trying to answer the question without spilling the truth, and draws a blank.

“I was scared, I guess,” he says quietly. “I just thought — I mean, I keep dreaming over and over that my best friend dies the same, bloody death and what if…what if it’s not a dream anymore? What if it’s a warning or something?”

“Like a vision?” April tries to clarify. At Raph’s shaky nod she inhales sharply and shuts her eyes. “Yeah, okay, no. It’s definitely not that.”

He gets mad before he can stop himself—the kind of frantic anger that has no definite beginning or end and scares him the most. “How do you know that?”

“Because I know *you*,” April says, “and if something managed to hurt someone you care about more than once you’d rip it’s heart out.”

Oh. *Oh*. He deflates. There’s more truth in that than he’d like to admit. Raph can believe it though, and that’s what’s important.

“So you don’t think it’s a vision-thing.”

“I *know* it’s definitely not a vision-thing,” April affirms. “See, there’s this thing about nightmares—you’re never yourself in them. You’re always too slow or too weak or too small. You can never take on the big bad because you’re too afraid of it, and your mind is telling you it’s real and you don’t question in. And trust me when I say you’re the strongest person I know. If you’re too weak to do something, it’s definitely *not* in reality.”

“Is…is that a compliment?”

“Don’t let it go to your head.”

She still doesn’t reach out for him, but he can tell she’s dying to. Against his better judgement and places a hand on top of her, shudders at the chill of it, then to his surprise, realizes that her hands is warm. Of course it’s warm; she’s *alive*. Raph doesn’t realize that he’s staring at their hands until April tilts his chin up slightly, making their eyes meet.

In that moment, Raph realizes that April O’Neil isn’t his weakness at all. She’s the strongest person he knows. And he’s not quite sure if he’s in love with her, but absolutely needs her.

“I have an idea,” she says a bit awkwardly, to fill the silence.

Raph is still staring at her like she’s revealed the secrets of the universe to him. “Yeah?”

“It’s like, midnight—I’m tired, you’re tired, and we both just want this nightmare to end. Let’s just go to sleep.”

###

Raph knows the exact moment April dies.

He knows because one second she’s squeezing onto his hand and the next she’s limp in his grip; her eyes remain wide open but there’s nothing behind them, and her lips are parted as if she’s whispering to him, even in death. Her body looks like a painting, perfectly still and the pale of her skin is interrupted by dark, rich blood—blood that’s her own, or maybe his, he can’t quite tell.

He looks down at himself to find a wound he doesn’t remember receiving, and then he looks back at April, and he’s so fed up with this shit he could level a civilization.

Around him darkness, and he stares deep into it. Nothing is there. He’s alone except for the dead girl he’s holding onto.

April O’Neil is not a weakness, he reminds himself, she’s *strength*, and she’s one of the greatest things about his life. She will not bring him to his knees; instead, he will use her to rise up.

Raph stands to his feet without letting go of her hand. He tugs on it, once. “April, get up.”

And she stands too, without any resistance. She dusts herself off and the blood splattered on her fades. “Thought you’d never ask,” she says, smirking, and squeezes his hand.

###

In his sleep, Raph sighs contentedly without wakening, and April sneaks a peek at him out of one eye. He gives no sign of struggle or fear. She smiles and presses her face into his neck before drifting off herself.

For the first time in weeks, Raph sleeps soundly for the whole night.

Chapter 4: Kiss

Chapter Summary

> "…she cups his chin and plants one on him, right on the mouth."

Chapter Notes

> i absolutely love writing kisses between these two, in case you couldn't tell.

"You're a jerk, you know that?"

"Oh wow, what a comeback. I'll be recovering from that blow for weeks."

April fumes and wishes, desperately, she had rippling muscles like Raph's for the sake of using them to strangle him. It wasn't really her fault that she'd been pushed to this point; Raph had a special talent for driving people crazy. She's just unlucky enough to have no method of physically shutting him up.

…or does she?

The turtle in question stares at her, the trace of smirk on his face. He knows he's riling her up and he's having the time of his life doing it.

"Raph," she says, forming her plan as she speaks, "I will slap you so hard you won't be able to pull your head out of your shell for *a month*."

"With these twiggy arms?" Raph has the audacity to grab her wrists and wiggle her arms for emphasis. And, well, he's not exactly wrong—she's not the bulkiest person around, but she glares hard at him nonetheless. "I'd love to see you try it, O'Neil."

April rips her arms away from his hands and sucks in her breath sharply. When she raises her hands, there's a moment of brief surprise in Raph's eyes, like he didn't actually expect her to do it, and she finds herself smirking when, instead of slapping him silly, she cups his chin and plants one on him, right on the mouth.

She makes it absolutely *sloppy*. Wet and loud, she adds a smacking sound when she pulls away and rubs her mouth on her sleeve. Raph has been effectively forced silent, and April feels pretty accomplished when she pats his cheek twice and steps around him.

“Go be a tool somewhere else, alright?” She tells him diplomatically as she leaves him behind.

Raph doesn’t—c*an’t* say anything. He stands frozen for several moments, a blush quickly spreading down his neck, then stutters back to life and gags while rubbing furiously at his lips.

If she didn’t think it would make her dramatic exit less cool, April totally would’ve high-fived herself.

###

Like most terrible ideas, her plan backfires.

Almost a week after her ‘brilliant’ strategy, Raph has taken it upon himself to make her miserable. He’s far more annoying when he really puts his mind to it, and most days April is mere seconds away from punching him in the face as hard as she can.

Over dinner, Raph ups his game. He passes the pizza box to everyone, expertly dodging her grabs for it and pretending he can’t even see her. It’s the oldest trick in the book — April remembers her older cousins tormenting her as a child by pretending they couldn’t see her for two full days — but on top of all the other crap he’s pulled during the day, it’s just the icing on the cake.

“Give me the pizza, Raph,” April all but snarls.

Raph frowns, the corner of his mouth twitching like not smiling is a struggle for him. “Whoa, guys, did you hear that? It sounds like the air is talking?”

Mikey snickers into his second slice, and Leo simply shakes his head at her apologetically. Donnie just seems relieved that Raph has found a new target for the time being.

“Raph! I’m starving! Give me the pizza!”

“Dude, I think we’ve got a ghost in the lair!” He lifts his hand and talks behind it, like that’ll make his words a secret, “And she sounds *butt-ugly*.”

April turns to Leo. “I’m gonna kill him,” she tells him seriously. “He’s a dead turtle walking.”

Leo nods his approval. “Just try not to make a mess,” he says, and bites into his pepperoni.

April makes another futile grab for the pizza box, and as she throws herself at it, Raph snakes an arm around her waist and dips her, actually*dips* her almost to the ground, and kisses the hell out of her.

Her mind goes blank for a few moments, until she realizes that everyone is watching and starts to pry Raph’s fingers away. He doesn’t let go though; just keeps kissing her, smiling against her even. Just when April thinks she’s going to pass out from lack of air, Raph pulls away with a wets*mack* and grins down at her.

“L-let,” April stutters, her and face and ears reddening, “let me *go*.”

“Sure thing,” Raph nods once, and then drops her.

No one says anything while she lays helplessly on the ground. Raph drops the pizza box on her before kicking his feet over the edge of the couch and completely investing himself into the show playing on the TV.

Finally, Donnie coughs. (Mikey is trying to collect the pizza that had fallen when he’s jaw dropped. Leo, like Raph, is suddenly smitten with whatever TV show is on.) “So…what was that?” he asks hesitantly, all too aware that he might not want to hear the answer after all.

“I gave April the pizza,” Raph says innocently.

From her spot on the floor, April lifts up a hand — the one she’s not using to wipe at her lips — to elegantly flip him off.

###

All April can think about the next day is that he dipped her. He *dipped* her. And in front of everyone! When Raph gets revenge, he does *not* play around.

So of course, she thinks of something better.

During training, she immediately asks Sensei for Raph as her sparring partner. The others don’t seem all that surprised, as they’ve more or less figured out the extensive fight she and Raph are having. They also want nothing to do with it, so no one tries to intervene.

Raph eyes her warily, but he still seems pretty proud of himself for his revenge stunt. As they circle each other, he smirks at her. “You want to settle the score, Ape? Sorry to break it to you, but this is *my* domain.”

His eyes say, *If you try to kiss me, I’ll probably break you.*

April shrugs; it’s a risks she’s willing to take. “We’ll see about that, tough guy. Come at me.” And, just to make him mad, she curls her fingers at him, beckoning.

He lumbers toward her and April braces herself for it. At the last moment she sidesteps him, ducks under the punch he throws to compensate, and shuffles backward to prepare for his next strike. April shuffles directly into Splinter’s line of sight, and Raph doesn’t seem to realize this until he’s already in motion.

This time, April let’s him hit her. She takes the brunt of the impact with her shoulder, only turning her head to him when he’s at a full stop. A single second is all she has to smirk at him and really savor his look of impending doom.

She throws an arm around his neck and pulls him into her.

This has to be the best kiss yet; Raph squirms but she’s got him in a pretty tight grip, and April keeps her eyes open long enough to witness everyone else freeze completely. When she

knows she has their attention, she closes her eyes and just enjoys the moment.

Unbelievably enough, Raph isn't a terrible kisser, even when he's trying to pull away from her while simultaneously punching her in the gut. April draws out the kiss a little longer, and when she finally allows Raph to draw away, she follows his lips like she's expecting more.

The look he gives her expresses, very clearly, *wanton murder*. April winks at him.

"*Yame*!" Sensei says, rather uselessly, since no one is moving anyway. (Though Leo does smack his quietly forehead.)

Sensei begins a tangent of rapid Japanese that she can't follow, but Raph dips his head down and looks thoroughly chastised for the duration of it. He flushes a deep red and keeps his eyes down, only darts his gaze up once to utter a weak, "*Hai, Sensei,*" at the end of it.

April wishes she could take a picture of his face.

"April," Sensei snaps, bringing her out of her reverie. He looks pretty mad still, but also fairly exasperated. "What, exactly, was *that*?"

"Making creative use of my skills, Sensei." She even bows, her voice entirely respectful, even though it's hard not to take the chance to gloat in Raph's face. "You once said to unbalance your opponent in any way, so I did." April beams up at him.

Splinter looks terribly uncomfortable—and a little annoyed that he ever said those words in the past. "I…yes, I did. Please, next time, be a little less creative."

"Hai, Sensei."

Leo, Mikey, and Donnie are staring at her like she's an evil genius. And, well, they're not wrong.

Raph, on the other hand, barely waits for Splinter to say, "*Hajime*!" before tackling her to the ground.

###

Raph pulls her into his room, slams the door shut and spins around to yell at her.

"Stop kissing me at random times!"

April's been waiting for this to happen. She crosses her arms, prepared to fight this thing through. "You stop first!"

"You started it!"

"So why don't you end it?"

April immediately regrets her words; she scrambles to run out of the room, but it's too late. She only manages to fling the door open before Raph takes two steps and bodily lifts her up

in a way that would be incredibly romantic if he didn't look ready to drown her in the Hudson. He wraps his arms around her waist a little too tightly, most likely on purpose, and kisses her so aggressively he might as well have punched her instead.

"There," he gripes, "I just ended it."

At first, April wants to argue it more. But she has a better idea…

She deflates all at once and shrugs. "Okay, fine. You win. Happy now?"

"Very," Raph growls. He's still holding her, and now that they're not yelling at each other he takes in the scene they're making and goes a little pink, hastily trying to put her down when she suddenly wraps herself tight around him.

"Oh, *Raph*," she yells, "I *knew* you liked me! Kiss me again!"

He gapes at her. "You — you're fuckin' *crazy* —"

"You're crazy about me?" April swoons, loudly enough that her voice echoes throughout the lair for everyone to hear. "You know just the right things to say to a girl!

"I'm gonna kill you," he hisses, "I'm gonna kill you like ten different times —"

"Kiss me again so I know it's real!"

That last line is more than a little forced, and April bursts into giggles as soon as she says it. Raph keeps glaring at her, but his mouth quirks up briefly until he fights it back down.

"Stop that, you *freak*."

She's laughing too hard to answer him, and it takes another few moments for his resolve to break. He cranes his neck up at her and cracks a smile, and then they both erupt into snickers. It's completely crazy, since they've been at each other's throats (and lips) for nearly two and a half weeks now, but they laugh like no hard feelings have ever come between them. Maybe the tension actually did drive them crazy.

Raph slowly slides her down until her toes touch the floor, and she stares at his lips for a few lingering moments. Her stomach twists, the familiar feeling of butterflies. April leans forward and —

She would hardly count it as a kiss— her lips just barely graze his for less than a second. But she turns bright red when she pulls away.

Raph looks at her like she's grown a second head. April can't blame him — she's not entirely sure where that came from either — and only offers a shrug in response.

"Don't get a big head about it," she reminds him. "You're still a turd."

Raph leers at her. "So that's your type, huh?"

“Get real. You’re not my type.”

“‘Course not,” he says, but he’s laughing.

When she looks down, they’re still wrapped around each other, but he isn’t letting go, so she won’t either.

Chapter 5: Competition

Chapter Summary

> “And she decides right then and there, despite the fact that she’d rather go back to bed than respond to a declaration of war, that she is going to make him regret waking up that morning.”

Chapter Notes

> this prompt gave me hell. im gonna tell you in advance that this isn’t very good, its borderline crack!fic, but i just really like having raph and april do stupid things to make each other mad.

April makes a point of not being in the lair during breakfast time, after the ‘eggy in a basket incident’ that Donnie is *still* apologizing for, two months later. The boys might be well-trained ninjas, but they barely know how to hold a fork without using the business end of it as a weapon. (Plus, Leo’s eggs taste like charcoal, and Leo really likes to make eggs, and April doesn’t have the heart to crush his dreams.)

So when she stays over breakfast, it’s a big deal.

Sleepover nights usually involve very little sleep, depending on the day’s activities. Slow days with no missions end at 4 am, with everyone mumbling stupid impossibilities at each other until they drift off (“What if the sky was purple.”/ “What if your legs didn’t know they were legs?”) Action pact days leave them drained, and they’re lucky if they find a soft surface before collapsing.

Yesterday had been a slow day, and April had made it her personal goal to introduce the boys to the sweeter, nerdier shows in life, and thus they’d watched an old *Transformers* cartoon until they couldn’t take it anymore.

The morning is sluggish; Splinter harrumphs at them all but allows them a day off, and April sighs relief into her glass of orange juice. Until Raph tips the bottom and half of it goes dribbling down her chin onto her shirt.

“Jerk,” April says, tiredly swinging at him. He grins as her punch goes wide.

“You punch like a girl.”

"*Misogynistic* jerk."

"Fine. You punch like a fully capable and totally not-lesser girl that just so happens to also be weak as hell."

April frowns deeply at him, then at her shirt, then back at him. "Shoo fly, don't bother me."

Surprisingly enough, that shuts him up for a while. Long enough for Mikey to serve up toast and eggs, and April digs in like it's her last meal.

"I made the eggs," Leo says proudly. "Bon appetit!"

April grimaces and eats a lot slower. If she tries hard enough, she can pretend the butter cancels out the charcoal taste.

She makes sure to place her new glass of the juice on the side farthest away from Raph, eying him warily as she does so. He's angelically quiet which means he's planning something, she knows it.

"Hey, April, do you want to play a game?"

"No, I want to eat my toast and char—er, eggs." April narrows her eyes. "Why are you smiling at me like that?"

Before she has the chance to regret everything, he addresses the rest of the turtles by pounding his fist on the table. "Yo, guys," he declares loudly, "lay off April for a few days guys. It's that time of the month, you know? And be nice about it—she's *super* shy."

April chokes on her toast.

It's the look on Leo's face that really gets to her—he looks like he can't decide between surging forward to comfort her or ignoring Raph's statement. Apparently he opts for the former; gently, he reaches out to pat her on the back. "Um," he says.

"Don't," April chokes, trying to glare at Raph despite her convulsing. "Seriously, Leo, just *don't*."

"Uh, April, if you need any…pain-killers or anything I'd be happy to—"

"Donnie, that's sweet, really, but I'm fine." She gives him a watery smile that he returns with noticeable hesitation. Then her smile falls and she's back to glaring again. "The only person here that's gonna need pain-killers is *Raph* as soon as I'm done with him."

Mikey stabs his eggs with his chopsticks. They chip and break off into splinters on his plate. "Is that a PMS thing? Cuz it sounds like a PMS thing."

"Mikey," Leo scolds, "that's rude."

"Also, it's likely a myth," Donnie starts, but his no doubt enlightening tangent is cut short by Leo's sharp look.

Raph tips back his chair and kicks his feet up, smirking like he's won. "Your move," he tells April.

And she decides right then and there, despite the fact that she'd rather go back to bed than respond to a declaration of war, that she is going to make him regret waking up that morning.

April stands up.

"Alright, well, we were hoping to tell you guys differently, but I guess now's a time as good as any." She gestures at Raph, who arches his brow but doesn't comment. "Anyway, we're secretly dating. Not-so-secretly now. Isn't that right, babe?" She looks at Raph adoringly, never breaking even as he slams his feet back on the ground hard enough to make the table rumble.

"What?" Donnie squeaks.

"Why didn't you tell us?"

"Secrets, secrets are no fun unless they're shared with everyone," Mikey pouts. "Or at least *me*! C'mon, guys!"

April holds up her hands placatingly, "Guys, guys, hold on, would you? We didn't want to tell you because—"

Raph catches on seconds before she gets the words out. He shakes a fist at her. "April, you wouldn't dare—"

"—I'm pregnant!" April says happily. "With *twins*!"

Raph falls out of his chair.

April sits back down.

She even puts a hand on her stomach, just to drive the point home, and smiles into her toast as Leo calls for an 'emergency brother meeting.' The door to the kitchen is really just a curtain, and they barely make it out of that before Leo *really* let's loose on Raph.

"YOU CAN'T BE A FATHER. YOU CAN'T EVEN TAKE CARE OF A PET."

"Wha—*hey*! I took *great* care of Spike!"

"HE MUTATED INTO A TWELVE FOOT DINOSAUR AND TRIED TO KILL US ALL. *TWICE*."

Even with the background noise, she can finally enjoy her breakfast in peace. And in victory.

If this is the new standard for breakfast with the Hamatos, she's going to make a point of sticking around more often.

###

Breakfast leaves her with a surprising amount of energy, and April has a spring in her step for the rest of the day. None of the boys will meet her eyes—instead they're all staring at her stomach. (Well, not Donnie; he quickly makes off to his lab, and April mentally kicks herself for not accounting for his reaction. She makes a mental note to pick up his favorite kind of cheesecake for an apology.)

"Mikey, stop touching me."

He has both has spread across her stomach, grinning like it's the best thing in the world. "Whaaat? These are my future nieces or nephews, April, I gotta get to know them!"

She makes a face. "By rubbing the skin off my stomach?"

"I'm trying to get them used to me. If I play my cards right, their first words'll be Uncle 'Mikey.'"

"As sweet as that is, I really should talk to Raph. He's their daddy after all." April pulls Mikey's hands away and drifts over to where Raph is leaning against the wall by their bedrooms looking ready to burn down a country.

"Hey, baby," April greets.

"I'm going to break off your arm and make you eat it."

"That's hardly good nutrition for our kids, don't you think?"

Raph splutters and groans into his hands. April slings an arm around his shoulders, grinning. "You should've thought about this before trying to play this game with me. I always win, Raphie-boy."

"Seriously. Your arm. I'm gonna make you digest it," Raph reiterates, this time giving her a visual with his hands. "Now quit the act and tell my brothers the truth before Leo tells Sensei and we *both* get thrown neck-deep in shit."

"Wellll," April sing-songs. "On one condition."

"What?"

"Admit that I won, and you're a total loser. Out loud. And you have to tell Leo his eggs taste like rocks."

"I know when I'm beat, but I'm not about to crush that kid's dreams." April snorts; Raph bristles, affronted. "Look, he's a tool, yeah, but he's my brother and he's got the kicked puppy look down pat. I don't need anymore of that in my life."

Rolling her eyes, April grabs for her stomach. "Oh no," she says loudly. "I feel sick. Like morning sickness sick. Because of the babies that I'm having. Ahhh."

"You're a terrible actress," Raph says flatly.

"Oh, the humanity! My, um, womb, I guess? Yeah, my womb, and these darned *embryos*."

"Jesus H Christ," is all Raph can manage, but he pushes off the wall hastily. "Alright, alright, I'll do it," he relents. "But as soon as everyone knows you're faking, I'm gonna punch you into next Wednesday."

Appeased, April gives up trying to fake nausea. "Perfect," she says, letting the glare he gives slide right off her. "Whenever you're ready."

Raph starts off with a dry, "I hate you." Then he hunches his shoulders and clenches his teeth. "You won, I lost—"

"*Ahem*."

His jaw twitches. "And I'm a loser."

"What kind of loser?"

"A *total* loser."

April pretends to wipe a tear from her eye. "Music to my ears."

"I literally hate everything about you."

"Yeah, yeah," April dismisses him with a wave of her hand. "Anyway, I've decided to be nice today. Don't worry about breaking Leo's heart, I'll tell him the truth anyway."

Raph hesitates. "Really?"

"Yeah, really. And you don't have to say it, I know: I'm the best."

He relaxes into a smile so genuine April has to do a double take, and yet another one when he reaches out to grab her hand. "*Thanks*," he says sincerely, giving a squeeze.

"Um," she says, furrowing her brow. "You're welcome? I guess?"

Something changes in the air between them, and April really thinks they're having a moment.

And then he ruins it by swinging her into his arms, bridal-style, and dumps her into the nearest pool, smiling about it like it's the best thing that's happened to him all day.

By the time she sloshes her way back to dry land, April concedes to calling it a draw. (… Until next time, of course.)

Chapter 6: Secrets; Safe

Chapter Summary

> “Raph, I’m still looking at you,” April reiterates, and then smiles wetly when she takes his hand again, “and you know what? You look perfect.”
>
> also
>
> “You’re right; he doesn’t need me to push. But he might need me to pull him in.”

Chapter Notes

> I've accidentally become a pro at writing long winded stories about these two yelling at each other while simultaneously falling hopelessly in love. send help.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

There’s something under the mask.

There’s *got* to be something under the mask.

Raph has his mask under lock and key; his brothers take theirs off rather liberally, seemingly under no strict code to wear it at all times, but Raph’s is all but glued to his face. He wears it to sleep. He wears it to shower. He wears it all the time.

There’s *definitely* something under the mask.

Ninjas and boundaries go together hand in hand, and April respects that. Leo gets weirdly shifty about personal space. Donnie gets uncomfortable with too much eye contact. Splinter is a bundle of nerves at best and highly paranoid at worst; with his past, she can’t blame him, she just does her best to knock and speak in gentle tones. Even non-ninjas have boundaries--like, Casey’s got this *thing* about loud noises--and April herself draws the line at bats and other things that go bump in the night.

Boundaries are common. Secrets bloom like dandelions. April understands all of this.

But there’s something different about Raph and his mask.

He’s borderline insecure about it. She’s seen insecurity up close, she knows it like the back of her hand, and she recognizes it in Raph’s eyes when his mask starts to sag or a strong breeze comes by. It’s so unlike his usual personality that it never fails to stop her in her tracks.

And she wants to help. She wants to help so badly it aches, but he won't even let her hand near his head, much less talk about it. Each day passes and April's curiosity and desire to help grow stronger. The thought of Raph going mad inside his own head over something under his mask drives her nuts--and she vows to do something about it.

Leo seems like the best candidate to get answers from. She approaches sweetly, casually, by sitting next to him for the start of a Space Heroes marathon and working it into conversation.

"Is your mask," she says thoughtfully, eying the way Leo hunches over his knees, "a problem for you?"

Leo raises his brow at her. "What do you mean?"

"Does not wearing it bother you? Is it some kind of ninja thing to wear it as much as possible?"

"Where do you even get all these weird ideas from? Ninja aren't *that* weird," Leo says. "And no, not wearing it doesn't bother me. I used to be affected by it, when I was little, but at some point I stopped linking my effectiveness as a ninja to the amount of time I spent in my mask."

"You linked them together?"

Leo frowns. With mild reluctance he mutes the TV before turning to her. "Yeah, in a way. We got the masks when we first started training--we couldn't have been any older than five. I thought like any other five year old. Remember having a favorite blanket or toy you couldn't sleep without? It was like that, only I felt like I couldn't succeed as a ninja without my mask."

April knits her eyebrows together. "Why?"

"I just told you I was five. I don't think *anything* I did back then made sense."

He offers a small smile, which she accepts and returns with one of her own. "Point taken," she allows. "Do you think--"

"It's the same for my brothers?" Leo hardly notices her semi-sheepish expression; he just shrugs. "I don't know."

His eyes flash, and in the span of a single heartbeat he goes from gentle elder brother to protective leader. "April, if you're asking this about Raphael, please don't push him. If you try to pry, he'll shut you out."

"I'm not going to pry," she refutes, bristling, "I just want him to know that if he needs someone, he has me."

The look Leo gives her is more than perplexed. He hides it quickly, allowing that fierce protectiveness pass over his face once again. "That won't work as well as you think it will."

"But I have to *try*," she says.

“No, you have to respect his boundaries. Don’t press. If he opens up to you, he does it because he wants to, not because you forced him to.”

“Yeah, because getting Raph to readily talk about his feelings is *so* easy.”

Leo grins ruefully. “That’s exactly why you need to give him space. He keeps to himself and his prickly and he likes himself that way.”

If that’s so true, April wonder, then why does he seem so terrified of losing his mask? Why does he late it harbor over him like a puppeteer?

Resolutely, she looks at Leo, and she says, “You know, I’m not really so sure I believe that.”

“April, don’t do what I think you’re going to do. Raph will not appreciate it--he will *hate* you for it, he will let you *know* that he hates you for it, and I don’t want to see the two of you fall out because--” and he stops short, widens his eyes, and clamps his lips together.

“Because what?” She puts her hands on his knees and stares at him. “Because *what*?”

He just shakes his head. “It’s not my place to say.”

“*Leonardo*.”

“Raph appreciates you,” Leo says, not looking at her, “he doesn’t say it, but he does. I should probably congratulate you on that much; getting appreciation from him is like pulling teeth. But, even though he appreciates you, he’s not going to make himself an open book for you. That’s just not who he is. Fighting him over it will only make it worse.”

“You say that like he’s not an open book to me already,” April notes. “Also, look down.”

Obligingly, Leo does, and he sees her hands on his knees and he stares. He stares for a long while, frowns and tilts his head, like he’s just now realizing how *close* April is and how close she’s been this whole time. His first instinct is to hunch his shoulders and edge away, but she watches the lines on his face relax.

“A month ago, if I’d gotten this close to you, you would’ve left the room.” She rubs slow, gentle circles into his knees. “A month ago, you would’ve grit your teeth and walked away from me as if I’d slapped you. You even got edgy when we sat next to each for dinner. And now? Now I could climb into your lap and settle there and you wouldn’t even notice.”

He sets his jaw. “April--”

“No, just listen. I’m not as unobservant as you think, and I’m a lot more empathetic than you realize. You bleed, I bandage. You hide and I find you. I’m not trying to say I changed you, but I *am* saying that I *helped* you. And that’s what I want to do for Raph. I just want to help him.

“You’re right; he doesn’t need me to push. But he might need me to pull him in.”

The truth is: she loves him. She wants to help him *because* she loves him, because she cares about him, and seeing him lose himself makes her stomach churn.

She doesn't realize how bad it is, not even after discussing with Leo, until Donnie and Mikey come in one night with Raph between them, dragging his feet across the floor, wearing matching solemn expressions.

They take him immediately to Donnie's lab, hoist him on one of the tables and fit a pillow under his neck. He doesn't even moan. His eyes are half-open, like he just woke and is contemplating going back to sleep for the rest of eternity.

"Fishface bit him," Donnie explains. "It's happened before. I have the antidote. He'll be fine--as long as next time around, he listens to me when I tell him to watch his back." He mutters, "Or next time, *I'll* have his back, and we won't end up like this again."

Because he's tired and he's frustrated, he blinks a lot and bustles about and checks on Mikey while he hunts down the antidote. And Mike looks kind of dazed, dazed but unharmed, and sits there quietly.

"I think," he says, for the first time all night, "I'm going to break Fishface's legs."

It isn't a joke. It's coming out of Mikey, and it isn't a joke, and that is--worrying. Very. Anger courses through her veins like blood, and she says, "I'll help."

Very suddenly, Raph sits up perfectly straight. He looks sicks. He blinks blearily at the two of them, points at Mikey and asks him if he's okay. Only he mumbles and it comes out like gibberish, but Mikey nods and nods and holds his hand and tells him yes.

April doesn't feel like she's intruding. She just takes his other hand and sighs.

Briefly, she wonders if telling him that she loves him would count, when he can barely fit his tongue in his mouth.

"Hey, Raphie," she says, forcing a smile, "just relax, okay? Donnie's bringing you the antidote. You'll be fine."

"'M fine righ now," he responds. He looks at their joined hands. "When did Mike get girl hands?"

The smile turns a little less forced. Mikey snorts. "Dude, my hands are fine. You're making googly eyes at April's, not mine."

"Ohhhhh, *April*," Raph says faintly, like he's struggling to remember. "She's pretty. And - you know - helpful, and shit. She smells like rainbows. That's cool."

"Yeah, dude, it's really cool."

April feels pleased. She grips onto his hand a little tighter. "Thank you, Raph. I appreciate that."

“I got ‘chu, girl. Got 'chu...got you...your nose!” And then he accidentally slaps himself in the face in an attempt to reach for her nose.

Mikey laughs outright and April’s heart speeds up, hardly the worst thing she’s ever seen Raph do but decidedly one of the cutest.

“Ow, owwww, oh my god,” Raph says. He goes from in pain to mild panic in two seconds flat. There’s a wild look in his eyes when he turns to her. “Oh my god! I don’t have a nose. I DON’T have a NOSE.”

April starts to laugh over his continuous lamenting over being a noseless outlier, only Raph’s expression melts into real, actual panic. “I told the sunflowers my face was fuh...fuh-huh? *fucked,*” he sounds it out, rolls out his tongue and it hangs uselessly out of his mouth while he looks up balefully at the ceiling. “Told ‘em. They didn’t believe me, but ‘s *true*.”

Eyes wide, April looks at Mikey, but he’s staring openly at Raph.

“...What?”

“My face,” Raph whines, “it’s fucked up, it’s fucked up bad. Hate it. And my mask smells like butts.” He scowls. “I hate butts. Quit lookin’ at me till I find my nose.”

And her heart *breaks*.

She’s got it *so* bad.

Even delusional, Raph carries resentment towards his own face and he looks so sad and so angry and so tired, and April doesn’t realize she’s let go of his hand until he’s staring at the empty space where she was. “April? April?”

Her name rolling off his lips while he sounds so lost and confused makes her insides twist. She looks at Mikey helplessly, then sucks in a deep breath.

“I’m looking at you.”

“Stoooooop. ’m a mess.” Raph glares daggers at the wall opposite her head. “Tell that unicorn to shut up.”

"Shut up," Mikey tells the empty air.

“Raph, I’m still looking at you,” April reiterates, and then smiles wetly when she takes his hand again, “and you know what? You look *perfect*.”

Raph’s recovery is slow; the venom was stronger this time, stayed in his system longer. He’s tired and boneless for days afterward. He does a lot of nothing, a lot of glaring, and his mask has never been tied tighter on his face.

He pushes everyone away.

And April? She's drawn to him like a moth to light.

He's in a low place, lower than he's ever been, and she's the one that he holds his head up high for. She takes his temperature and he turns his chin up for her. She calls his name and he looks up to catch her. She extends a hand and he reaches out to take it.

He doesn't say much. He doesn't need to for her to realize that he loves her.

It hits her all at once, while she watches him limp to the kitchen; he loves her. He *loves* her. It's in his eyes when he looks at her and in his hands when he reaches for her and in everything he does, because he's letting her hold him up while his legs wobble beneath him.

Her eyes get a little watery, enough so that he looks at her questioningly when he returns with a bottle of water in hand. "You good?"

"Yeah," she says, blinking. Her whole body feels warm under his gaze. "Yeah, I'm fine."

Raph grunts his approval and takes a seat beside her, and she nearly explodes from the inside out when she rests his head on his shoulder and he doesn't move away.

Mikey *does* break Fishface's legs, and April knocks him out with a well placed jab to the temple, and they don't look at Raph after it all ends.

Leo says nothing more than, "You can both relax now."

Only she really can't because the moment she drifts over to Raph, he tenses all over and storms away. And even though she feels like she's righted the world, she can't help but think that she's done something awfully wrong.

"Why did you do that?"

April looks down at the tape around her knuckles. "I don't know, Donnie showed me how to wrap them, I thought that--"

"Not that," Raph snarls, and her eyes snap up to look at him. "With Fishface. Why'd you do that?"

A thousand different ways to explain, that, when it comes down to it, April set whoever hurt him on fire and crush the ashes, but she can't find her voice to say it. Her breath hitches, watching him, taking in the anger that radiates from him.

"He deserved it," she says at length. "For what he did to you."

"What are you now, my savior? My knight in shining armor?" He looks so angry and she can't understand why. "You think you can just hurt a guy and do it in my name and suddenly I'll, I'll--"

"You'll what?"

“Turn plush and cuddly? Write you love letters and spell out ‘thank you’ in frosting on a cake? What’s your goal here?”

He stares her down, and somehow, she keeps it together. “My ‘*goal’* is take make sure no one hurts your dumb shell anymore than they already have.”

“But why?”

“Why the hell wouldn’t I?”

“It’s not like you actually *care*!”

April stares at him for a long moment. He waits on bated breath for her to take the bait and spark a fight. Instead, she goes back to tying off her hands. He fumes and waits until he gets annoyed and leaves in a blur of thrown up hands and muttered curses.

Something doesn’t sit right within her. There’s no argument that she cares, or at least, there shouldn’t be. For the time being, April thinks of Leo’s warnings about pushing, so she focuses on the tape winding around her fingers and nothing more.

She still loves him.

She’s always going to love him.

Something in his mind rejects this and refuses it. He either attacks her or ignores her, either way, he’s always been and hard-hitter, and nothing hits her harder than his actions. Each word he hisses is like a punch to the gut, another bruise to add to many.

Raph pushes and pushes because he thinks that she’ll break.

April rolls with the punches, takes what can and gives more than she has, and pulls him in.

He breaks before she does; his voice cracks in a scream and he doesn’t cry, exactly, but he looks like he could. “Stop acting! I’m not some pity story--I know what I said when I was fucked up with that venom, you don’t have to pretend because you feel bad for me. I know I’m fucked up and I get that, I know that, but you don’t have to pretend to put up with it because--who the fuck knows-- you think I’ve got a heart of gold? You think you can butter up the monster at the end of the story and he’ll change? Fuck that, and fuck *you*; I’m stuck like this, I’m green and angry as hell and that’s all I’ll ever be--”

She kisses him and captures the words and drinks in his anger and his resentment and feels him melt in her hands.

“Fuck you,” he pulls away and growls, “what is wrong with you?”

In hindsight, it was probably one of the more dramatic options she could’ve taken. For a first kiss though, it feels right. Not quite the serene scenario she’d always a imagined but it’s Raph; what did she expect?

The tips of her ears flush a hazy pink. “Me? What’s wrong with you! What makes you think I’m acting?”

He glares spectacularly well for someone who has his arms wrapped so tightly around her waist. “That’s - it makes sense.” He holds on a bit more desperately. “You think I don’t know I’m an asshole? I *do*. It’s not - just, no one falls for the asshole. Not even you.”

“How many times do I have to say I love you before you get that I really fucking love you?” April asks honestly. “You *are* a real asshole,” she starts, only to stop short when he snorts bitterly.

“Yeah, I know, thanks.”

“You’re a real asshole,” she says again, “but that doesn’t mean I don’t love you, or I could stop loving you. It’s not an on-off switch.” She shakes her head, “And you think you’re the only person that’s fucked up? Raph, aliens stole my mother and gave me their DNA before I was even born. I get headaches when I stand next to satellite dishes. I can sense when people walk in and out of rooms and sometimes, when I sneeze, I make TVs and cell phones frizz the hell out.

“My dad got kidnapped for 3 months and nobody but you guys would believe me; then after I got him back he got himself mutated because he was trying to save me, only for it to turn out later that he didn’t have to since *I can’t get mutated anyway*. I can’t think straight when I see bats; I sleep with a nightlight on because the dark scares the shit out of me. My own *dad* was my worst fear for a while. I am the *queen* of fucked up.”

She inhales sharply; he winces at the sound. Her hands tremble with aftershocks from releasing the pent up grievances she’d never voiced. “And,” and her voice cracks, so she has to swallow hard and start over, “and yeah, you’re a jerk and you’ve got fears and boundaries and secrets, but so does *everyone*. Especially me. But you know what? Even though I can’t stand the dark, I trek out to visit you guys every night. Even though I can’t stand the Kraang, I feel like I’m safe and sound when I’m fighting alongside you. For all I’ve been through, I could be a sniveling pile in the corner that’s too twitchy to trust anyone or leave her room, but I do because seeing you-- *you*, Raph-- makes me feel like I can do *anything*. So no, I’m not trying to be holier than thou and I’m not trying to change you--I’m just trying to help you the same way you helped me.”

For the first time, Raph reaches out to her, and he pulls.

He pulls her in and holds her against him and shudders under her touch; he hugs her like he’s desperate. And maybe he is. He hugs her like he loves her, so she does the same.

“I don’t,” he mumbles, deflating, “I just--*why*?”

The corners of April’s lips twitch. “Why not?”

“I’m not even nice. I’m fucking *green*.”

“Who said anything about being nice? Besides, green’s a cool color. It’s really starting to grow on me.”

“You seriously-- April, you *seriously*--”

“Love you,” she supplies, “so *much*.”

“You’re crazy.”

“Quit wetting yourself and just tell me if it’s mutual or not.”

He looks at her blankly. “*No shit* it’s mutual. I’m a jerk, not an idiot.”

As soon as he’s said it, he looks terrified. He looks scared that he could misplace her love and it would shatter at his feet. She kisses him and then he looks like he could give himself up if it meant she would do it again. “Alright,” he says and brings her hands up to his face. He guides her fingers to his mask and sucks in a deep breath. “Alright, fuck it, let’s do this.”

And together they peel away the last of his walls.

Chapter End Notes

i may or may not have edited the whole drugged!Raph scene just so he would be a noseless outlier who hates butts. oops?

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!